DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 650 PS 016 652

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TITLE Successful Learning Strategies for the Emerging Adolescent.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
JOURNAL CIT OMLEA (Oklahoma Middle Level Education Association) Journal; p1-7 1986-87

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Classroom Environment; *Cognitive Style; *Criteria; Guidelines; *Instructional Development; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Style Differentiated Instruction

ABSTRACT

Focusing on individual learning styles as a major component of intentional teaching, this discussion points out advantages for teachers who provide options based on students' learning styles in the classroom. Particular attention is given to the model of Style Differentiated Instruction (SDI) which developed from the research on styles, higher order thinking, and critical and creative thinking, and provides guidelines for the multiple approaches to style in the classroom. SDI suggests how to bridge to the stylistic needs of the learner on a daily basis. Ten general criteria by which teachers can create a learning style environment for young adolescents are identified. A chart offers a general explanation of style differences and some examples of style-matched learning/teaching strategies, and identifies characteristics, instructional needs of students, students' preferred strategies, cognitive processes, and student products associated with concrete sequential, abstract random, abstract sequential, and concrete random learning styles. (RH)

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1986-87 JOURNAL

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SUCCESSFUL LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR THE EMERGING ADOLESCENT

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"Out of 63 eighth grade science students, not one," she said, "Not one turned in the assignment late!" What made the difference? "Choices," remarked the teacher. "I gave them choices that were purposefully designed to meet the needs of different styles--and they loved having the options. They can't wait for the next unit!"

Comments like this are usual from teachers who provide learning options based on learning style. One teacher reported that his return rate for homework in a seventh grade English class went from 65% to 95% in a few weeks when he provided real choices. Another teacher glowed with pride for the success of a nearly drop-out student whose social studies product received statewide recognition.

What is the common denominator among these teachers which allowed them to develop successful strategies for different styles of learners? The answer lies in their approach. They are intentional teachers, professionals whose approach is intended to meet the learner from the learner's point of view. They have made a purposeful effort to understand their own style of thinking, learning and teaching, to modify the way it biases their classrooms, and to extend their repertoire of

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teaching strategies. They have insistently worked to understand styles and the importance of style in relation to the developmental issues, tasks, and instructional needs of the emerging adolescent.

I have chosen to focus on styles as a major component of intentional teaching for one main reason. Style, our unique way of showing others our strengths, limitations, preferences, and biases, reveals our minds in process and our individuality. By recognizing, appreciating and respecting the stylistic strengths in our students, we enhance self-esteem and positive self-concept, validate differences as gifts and show the value of diversity. By addressing differences, we create the opportunity for multiple paths to success in the classroom. By providing real outlets for individual strengths and preferences, we reduce the probability of stressful mismatch and encourage all students to be winners in their own quality way.

Although knowledge of style, acceptance of stylistic differences, and use of instructional strategies that match style are important for success in all learning situations, they are crucial in developing a successful learning environment for young adolescents. The developmental tasks of adolescence--forming personal identity, committing to group ideals, developing personal autonomy and understanding the meaning of relationships--all demand that the adolescent develop an understanding of self. Teachers can help adolescents to gain this understanding by working with a learner's strengths, often missed unless recognized through style. As a result, adolescents who are valued by teachers for their personal differences learn to see themselves as special. Learners who see success occur in many ways learn to test their own abilities.

Students who can participate, in their own positive way, in the life of a school learn to participate joyously in social structures. Children who are encouraged to reflect upon their own thinking learn to recognize and refine their own abilities.

Addressing learning styles, then, means providing multiple personal, interpersonal, intellectual and creative opportunities for the emerging adolescent to be successful in a personal, intrinsically motivating way. It means encouraging not only academic growth but also self-understanding. It requires the caring direction and guidance of teachers who can appreciate--not just tolerate--differences, and who will intentionally address a broad range of diversity in mental gifts, learning preferences, and personal expression.

Learning to work with style in the classroom requires each teacher to examine and analyze his or her own style and the ways in which that style promotes or dissuades learning. Incorporating style into the classroom necessitates an understanding of the style-demands behind various learning activities and strategies. Working actively with styles requires teachers to be astute observers of students as they engage in the learning process. Achieving success with style can happen only when the intentional teacher is willing to encourage, and open to receive, the strengths of the learner.

How does this happen? Not by following mechanical formulas but by using one's own individual teaching style to foster success. The structured chemistry teacher who uses writing-through-the-content area skills to help his or her holistics, not-so-detail-oriented students learn, invites success by bridging to their style. The creative, exploring

insures success for the concrete learner by providing hands-on experiences. The social studies teacher who designs units with multiple ways to gather information, engage with content and create at higher levels with different styles offers extensive and complex approaches to meeting the learner's mind in addressing development of higher order thinking. These teachers address learning styles for the emerging adolescent by intending to invite success through specific strategies designed to meet the needs and preferences of the learner.

One approach to incorporating styles is through the Model of Style Differentiated Instruction. SDI, developed from the research on styles, higher order thinking, and critical and creative thinking, provides guidelines for the multiple approaches to style in the classroom. In the most basic of ways, SDI suggests how to bridge to the stylistic needs of the learner on a daily basis. For example, students could be given a choice of doing an outline or web in a prewriting assignment, to work alone or with partners on a math assignment, to turn in a paper between Thursday morning and Friday afternoon, to brainstorm possibilities or read for ideas. These simple bridges allow the learner independence of decision within reasoned guidelines, increase opportunities for success through variety, and send clear messages that differences are legitimate. In more complex ways, SDI provides a model for teachers to organize and develop critical and creative thinking strategies to meet the needs of different styles of students.

What then, are the general criteria for creating a learning style environment for the emerging adolescent? Teachers successful with young adolescents suggest the following guidelines:

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1. Use instructional strategies that encourage students to participate actively in the learning process.

2. Provide stylistic bridges for differences on a daily basis.

3. Employ a variety of styles frequently, with a watchful eye for style match and mismatch.

4. Praise students authentically and frequently for their natural abilities, for attempts at stretching their style, for recognizing limitations, for risk-taking within and beyond their style.

5. Ask students to reflect on their own thinking styles through discussion, questioning techniques, journal writing, purposeful exploration of self.

6. Encourage students to use their own natural abilities in learning critical thinking skills.

7. Teach the higher order thinking skills natural to the mind's pattern of thinking.

8. Ask students to produce evidence of content through a variety of means, including creative projects. Allow for expression in a variety of styles.

9. Discuss your own natural style with students, point out your stylistic needs and behaviors, and honestly express a willingness to be open to students' differences. Do not compromise common sense, the reality of the instructional

program, or the importance of being a versatile teacher and learner.

10. Make personalized instruction a priority.

The chart on the following page offers a general explanation of style differences and a brief listing of some stylistically-matched strategies. It is a starting point for considering differences. By intentionally, but carefully, expanding our own teaching style, instructional strategies, and attitude toward diversity we can invite success for students in the most fragile of time--early adolescence.

References

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STYLE DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION
SOME EXAMPLES OF STYLE-MATCHED LEARNING/TEACHING STRATEGIES

Styles*	Characteristics	Need an Instructional Focus that supports	Prefer Strategies, such as	Are matched when asked to	Types of Products
Concrete Sequential	Organized Factual Efficient Task-Oriented Detailed	Structure & pattern Directions, details, Practical problems, Realistic situations Hands-on learning	Hands-on approaches Workbooks Data-gathering How-to projects Computers	Sort, label, list Collect, chart Make, construct Classify, measure Prepare, build	Timeline Graph Diorama Model Exhibit
Abstract Random	Imaginative Emotional Interpretative Holistic Flexible	Interpretation Explanation Communication Illustration Peer teaching	Groupwork Webbing, mapping Media, music Personalized examples Role play	Associate, connect Relate, express Share, present Interpret, perform Imagine, Counsel	Writing Arts, music Interview People-proj Journal
Abstract Sequential	Intellectual Analytical Theoretical Critical Convergent	Reason & logic Ideas & information Theory & concepts Analysis & evaluation Independent study	Lecture, text Content mastery Extensive reading Reporting Conceptual problems	Outline, report Devise, speculate Infer, hypothesize Summarize, verify Critique	Debate Document Theory Lecture Research
Concrete Random	Divergent Experiential Inventive Independent Risk-taker	Open-ended activity Exploration Investigation Experimentation Options	Brainstorming Simulations, games Problem-solving Experiments Finding alternatives	Explore, consider Reorganize Forecast, process Predict, create Recommend	Invention Editorial Solutions Games Experiments

*The learning style categories and terms--concrete sequential, abstract random, abstract sequential, concrete random--used in this chart are [illegible]